

COVID-19 Decision Trees for K-12 Schools

Frequently Asked Questions

Last Updated **Nov. 16, 2022** (changes highlighted in yellow)

COMMON TERMS

1. What is the definition of a close contact?

The definition of close contact depends on the size of the indoor space, the distance between the case and the contact, and the arrangement within the indoor environment. Specifically, a close contact is defined as follows:

- In indoor spaces 400,000 or fewer cubic feet per floor (such as home, clinic waiting room, airplane etc.), a close contact is defined as sharing the same indoor airspace for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period (for example, three individual 5-minute exposures for a total of 15 minutes) during an infected person's (confirmed by COVID-19 test or [clinical diagnosis](#)) infectious period.
- In large indoor spaces greater than 400,000 cubic feet per floor (such as open-floor-plan offices, warehouses, large retail stores, manufacturing, or food processing facilities), a close contact is defined as being within 6 feet of the infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period during the infected person's infectious period.

Spaces that are separated by floor-to-ceiling walls (e.g., offices, suites, rooms, waiting areas, bathrooms, or break or eating areas that are separated by floor-to-ceiling walls) must be considered distinct indoor airspaces.

CONTACT TRACING AND CLOSE CONTACTS

2. Is identifying close contacts in outdoor settings required?

No. The definition of close contact is focused solely on indoor exposures.

3. Can a COVID-positive household member isolate themselves in a room in their home?

If the COVID-positive person is not able to isolate in a separate residence, the county's [home isolation instructions](#) ([translations](#)) describe the specific requirements for isolation in a home occupied by others.

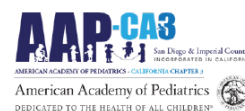
4. Can a person attend school/work if they live with a person who is COVID-positive?

A person who lives with a household member who is COVID-positive may continue to attend school/work if they do not have symptoms. The person should test immediately upon learning that they are a close contact, and again on Day 3, 4, or 5, after the COVID-positive household member completes their isolation.

- Student close contacts should be strongly encouraged to wear a mask indoors and around others through Day 10.
- Employee close contacts are required to wear a mask indoors and around others through Day 10.
- The person should isolate immediately if they develop symptoms or test positive.
- Employers are required to verify negative test results.
- Parents are expected to report positive test results to the school.
- The positive household member should isolate themselves as described in question 5.

5. Are people who are at least 14 days past completion of their primary COVID-19 vaccination series exempt from the requirement that they test on Day 3, 4, or 5?

No. Per the CDPH guidance people who are identified as a close contact of a person who was



contagious with COVID-19 should test on Day 3, 4, or 5 to remain in school/work. This includes people who are fully vaccinated. However, those who have recovered from a prior lab-confirmed infection within the last 30 days should not test as long as they remain asymptomatic (see question 11).

6. Are people who are within 30 days of a prior lab-confirmed infection exempt from the requirement that they test on Day 3, 4, or 5?

Yes. Per the CDPH guidance, people who do not have symptoms and have recovered from a prior verified infection within the last 30 days do not need to test on Day 3, 4, or 5 following an exposure. The CDPH guidance was updated to reduce the exemption from testing requirement from individuals within 90 days of a prior lab-confirmed infection to individuals within 30 days of a prior lab-confirmed infection. If symptoms develop, the person should take an antigen test immediately and follow the instructions on the Symptom and Isolation Tree.

7. Are schools required to see evidence of negative test results from students who are required to test as part of an exposed group?

No. Schools are not required to track test results. Parents are expected to inform the school when their child tests positive or develops symptoms.

ISOLATION

8. Can students who return from isolation before Day 11 participate in before- and after-school programs and activities on Days 6 through 10?

Children who are permitted to return to school from isolation before Day 11 may participate in before- and after-school expanded learning programs and childcare, however they should be strongly encouraged to wear a mask that fits snugly over their nose and mouth indoors

9. Can student athletes who return from isolation before Day 11 practice and compete on Days 6 through 10 if they commit to wearing a mask?

It is not prohibited, but it's also not advisable. A negative test result on Day 5 after symptom onset does not mean there is no virus in the person. It means that their viral load is low enough to reduce the chances of transmission while they are wearing a well-fitted mask. During exercise people exhale heavily, making their mask less effective, and increasing the chance of transmission. Limiting students who have returned from isolation to "walk-through" activities is advisable on Days 6 through 10.

10. Can musicians who return from isolation before Day 11 practice or perform on Days 6 through 10 if they use a bell cover over their instrument?

Students who return from isolation before Day 11 should be strongly encouraged to wear a mask that fits snugly over their nose and mouth indoors. A bell cover for the instrument is also strongly encouraged during days 6-10.

TESTING

11. When is confirmation of an antigen test result necessary?

Positive antigen test results, including positive at-home test results, do not require confirmation with a PCR or other NAAT.

- The decision tree for Asymptomatic Positive individuals has been updated, removing PCR confirmation as a means of verifying a positive antigen test result from a person who does not have symptoms.

12. Can at-home testing be used to satisfy testing requirements?



STUDENTS: Schools may accept the results of at-home testing for the same uses for which antigen tests are approved. Schools are encouraged to use a means described in the [Over-The-Counter Tests Guidance](#) to verify the results on tests administered at home. See the "What are best practices for verification of self-test results?" section for specific recommendations.

EMPLOYEES: Per Cal/OSHA, "an over-the-counter (OTC) COVID-19 test may be both self-administered and self-read if verification of the results, such as a time and date stamped photograph of the result or an OTC test that uses digital reporting with time and date stamped results, is provided." This guidance can be found in [Cal/OSHA's May 7 FAQs](#) under Testing.

STUDENTS and EMPLOYEES: When used for a person who has symptoms, the County of San Diego recommends that a negative antigen test be confirmed by a follow-up test (antigen, PCR, or other NAAT) administered the following day, and that the person isolate pending the result of that test.

13. What are the requirements if a person tests positive but has no symptoms?

If the person remains asymptomatic, they are required to self-isolate for at least 5 days past the date on which the positive test was collected. To return to school, students should wear a mask that fits snugly over their nose and mouth, indoors and within 6 feet of others outside, on Days 6 through 10. Per Cal/OSHA, employees are required to mask through Day 10 when returning from isolation.

If the person develops symptoms, isolation must be extended until 10 days have passed since the onset of symptoms.

VACCINATION STATUS

14. Has the standard for being fully vaccinated changed?

The term "fully vaccinated" has not been redefined. It still refers to a person who is 14 days past completion of the primary vaccination series that is recommended by the vaccine manufacturer.

15. Do K-12 workers who are unvaccinated need to continue testing weekly?

No. [Effective Sept. 17, 2022](#) unvaccinated K-12 workers no longer need to undergo weekly testing as previously mandated by the Aug. 2021 public health order.

REQUIREMENTS VERSUS RECOMMENDATIONS

15. Why are some of the CDC's recommendations not included in the decision trees?

While the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) makes recommendations, the requirements for California schools are established by the CDPH and the school's local health jurisdiction. The decision tree is based on the [CDPH K-12 guidance](#) and [related FAQ, K-12 Testing Strategies](#), [Cal/OSHA Emergency Temporary Standards](#), the local [public health orders](#), pertinent executive orders, and answers received directly from the CDPH.

16. Is quarantine optional?

The CDPH no longer requires quarantine for asymptomatic close contacts. People who have been identified as close contacts may remain at school or work unless they develop symptoms, and are expected to test on Day 3, 4, or 5 following their last exposure to a person who was contagious with COVID-19.

- For students, parents are expected to report positive test results to the school.
- Employers must require evidence of a verified negative test result, or exclude the employee through the end of Day 10.
- If a student or an employee develops one or more symptoms associated with COVID-19, they must isolate immediately and contact their school/employer.



